

Promising Practice: 10-Week College Readiness Program Pima Community College

Pima Community College has implemented a 10-week college readiness program designed to assist students who do not possess the academic competencies needed to begin training. The program's goals are to prepare students to pass the necessary entrance/assessment tests, complete their HPOG health care training, and achieve success on the job.

The program is delivered in a classroom environment, 24 hours a week, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. (with 30 minutes for lunch), Monday–Thursday. Average class size is about 15, and students are required to attend at least 80 percent of the sessions; an attendance rate lower than this will cause the student to be dropped from the class. The class consists of multiple components:

- Reading and writing (8–10 hours per week)
- Math (8–10 hours per week)
- Community Building (1–4 hours per week)
- College and career success (2–4 hours per week)

An orientation to the college readiness program includes descriptions of the roles of the County OneStop and the College Student Services and the purpose and expectations of the class. Students are also provided with contact information for key offices and advisors. These advisors assist students outside the classroom throughout the 10-week period with a number of activities, including campus tours, fingerprinting, completing the college application process, getting the necessary immunizations, and taking the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

Instructor philosophy is one of learner-directed methods (e.g., class brainstorming), with a focus on contextualized healthcare learning, critical thinking, and application of concepts. Instructors also use hands-on and experiential learning when possible and model the soft skills and professionalism that will be needed both throughout the training program and in the workplace. While instructors use a curriculum outline as a guide, they encourage students to reflect on what they already know as well as what knowledge gaps they need to fill. Student responses inform the instructors' lesson plans, allowing the students to feel a sense of ownership towards their education. As a result, students who would normally resist the idea of studying soft skills or basic math now feel comfortable, confident, and invested enough to accept coaching in these areas. Instructors also make themselves available outside of class hours, giving students an opportunity to discuss any issues they may be having.

According to HPOG program manager Amanda Abens and HPOG director Brian Stewart, one of the course's most compelling elements is the sense of community that develops among the students. Celebrating small achievements and allowing students to form organic peer-mentoring relationships helps personalize the college and ease new or nontraditional students' transition into college-level courses. The support given to students by instructors and peers also allows them to focus on success, with instructors helping students set both short-term and long-term goals. As Ms. Abens describes it, the college readiness environment moves students from "crisis mode" to "planning mode."

Ms. Abens and Mr. Stewart have a number of recommendations for other HPOG programs looking to develop college readiness courses. Foremost among them is being aware of the needs of the students. Letting students provide input on the direction and content of the class

makes them feel invested and motivated and helps strengthen the bond between instructor and students. Instructors should be experienced in adult education and be willing to work at the students' pace; a background in healthcare is an added bonus. Ms. Abens and Mr. Stewart also pointed out that, because their 10-week class is non-credit, program staff and instructors can modify and adapt the curriculum without going through the process required to change for-credit courses. This freedom has also allowed Pima to develop a college readiness "open lab" and has encouraged them to plan a contextualized English-as-a-second-language prep class.

Pima's 10-week college readiness program allows students to form bonds with peers and instructors and leads them to feel a sense of ownership and control over their education. In students who have completed this program, Pima's HPOG staff have noticed an increase in motivation, a bettering of attitude, and an increased willingness to seek assistance.

Grantee: Pima Community College

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